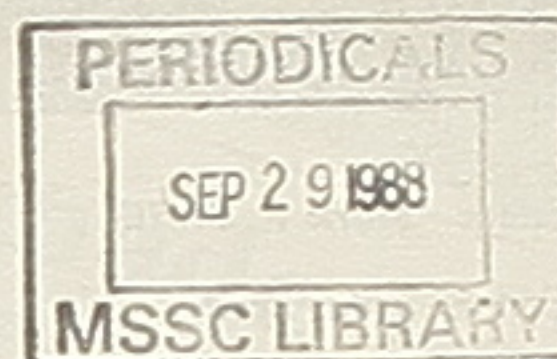


Volume IV, Number 1



*A supplement of The Chart
Missouri Southern State College
Joplin, Mo. 64801-1595*

AVALON

Thursday, Sept. 29, 1988
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Missouri Southern State College
A supplement of The Chart

Volume IV, Number 1

AVALON

Missouri Southern's Monthly Art and Literary Magazine

A Missouri College Newspaper Association
Awarding-Winning Publication

Editor **Mark R. Mulik**

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Avalon, as a supplement of *The Chart*, is published by Missouri Southern State College's communications department. It is a laboratory experience to its staff and a forum for writers, artists, and photographers at Missouri Southern.

Persons wanting to submit material (artwork, photographs, short stories, and poetry) may do so by dropping it by *The Chart* office, Room 117, Hearnes Hall. Artwork and photographs submitted must be ready for publication. Size alterations may be made on such work if it is needed in order to make the material fit within *Avalon's* pages. Literary material submitted must be in a legible format (typewritten is preferred).

Avalon claims one-time publication rights to work appearing in its pages.

BABYLON

After several agonizing days and nights of sorting everything out and putting it all together, my brain is functioning again.

Of course, another issue of *Avalon* has been sorted out and put together, too. But it's not "just another issue"—it's the first issue of Volume IV and the 15th issue of the publication.

So, what's in this issue? Well, we have: an essay, two short stories, a spread of photos and artwork, and an assortment of poems. A special, new feature of *Avalon* is a book review. I intend to recruit a book review writer for every issue. I believe this is a new, strong, literary feature to this art and literary magazine. Now, all I need is to find a new, strong, art feature, too.

Is that all I need?

You regular *Avalon* readers probably noticed fewer and fewer pieces of artwork and photos in print over the past year. You won't find much artwork or photos in this



issue, either—artwork is getting pretty hard to come by.

Artistic photographs are another thing entirely. Lots of people take photos. Many "pictures" people take while vacationing in the Alps (or somewhere closer to home) can be artistic. For instance, a photo of a shop window in *The Gallery* (pages 6-7) was taken in the French Quarter of New Orleans. So, all of you people who have vacation photos sitting around somewhere—take a good look at them. Ask yourself, "Are these photos artistic?" If you don't think so, stuff them back into your album and shove them back on the shelf for special occasions. If you think they are artistic, submit them to this illustrious publication, and we'll do our best to make sure you see them in print. Obviously, we can't print photos that are too dark or too light or photos that are very out-of-focus. In answer to a question you may be contemplating in your mind at this very moment—it's not much trouble to convert your color prints to black-and-white.

Keep in mind, the submission deadline for the next issue is noon Friday, Oct. 7.

Mark R. Mulik

BOOK REVIEW

BY **BRENDA CATES KILBY**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Gate to Women's Country, By Sherri S. Tepper (Doubleday, 1988), 278 pages, currently only available in hardback, \$17.95

Three hundred years after nuclear war has nearly destroyed Earth, most of the known world is uninhabitable wasteland. The areas where people can live are walled towns, where the gulf between the sexes has become institutionalized. Inside Women's Country, women are taught crafts and skills and encouraged to go to school for life. Men live separately inside a fenced garrison and study war. It is against the law for a man to read a woman's book.

Twice each year, the two separate camps get together sexually, during "carnivals," which last one month. Except for these furloughs, warriors do not mix with women, and are never allowed inside their residential areas. Their lives are totally



separate, unless a man decides to become a "servitor."

When a boy is five, he leaves his mother and sisters and goes to live with the men. At the age of 15, he must make a choice: either he will live with the warriors or go through the gate to Women's Country. If a boy chooses the women, he becomes a servant in one of their homes but is allowed to read and learn their knowledge.

Tepper's plot is based upon a premise that women instinctively cause the wars that men fight and, thus, happily give birth to warriors. In this story, she shows a society divided into camps: women against men. Parallel to the main story is a Greek tragedy concerning the Trojan wars. Presumably this play survived the "Convulsions" (the nuclear war) and was retooled to teach a valuable lesson to the women. Each year this play is acted out as a ritual reminder of their purpose.

This book is similar to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, in that it also deals with life on Earth after devastation (although it isn't nuclear war in Atwood's book). In both books, life has lost its hurried gait. Mass media is gone, and technology no longer rules the progression of things. The differences between Atwood's story and *The Gate to Women's Country* is that the tables are turned. Atwood described a totalitarian patriarchy, while Tepper has given us a socialistic matriarchy. Also, Atwood has more control over her plotlines than Tepper demonstrates here.

The characters are interesting people—

but it ends there. Readers can never quite get inside the narrator's skin. The moment a character begins to make sense, he or she does something that doesn't jive with his or her personality. This is especially true of the book's heroine, Stavia, who has an uncanny ability to turn her emotions over during difficult moments. Unfortunately, although we are treated to an exhaustive rendition of the important moments in Stavia's life, we are never shown when, how, or why this "ability" manifests itself.

Another problem Tepper has with her characters is their similarities to one another. Many are so alike it is necessary to backtrack a few pages once in awhile to keep the people straight.

Tepper's book is based on an interesting idea, and the shame is: It could have been a very good novel with a little more editing. It is unfortunate, but the whole book reads like a rush job, made all the more apparent by a typographical error on page 31. It is an interesting error, though; the author changes Stavia's name to "Stard." Perhaps that was her name when the book was first written, and later it was changed. The redeeming feature of this novel is a surprising plot twist toward the end that really is a surprise.

This ambitious little book will no doubt get high readership once it goes to paperback, and it may even become a best-seller—in spite of itself.

COVER ART

BY

**MARK
R.
MULIK**

Nana's Homemade Bread

an essay by Laurie Evans

Ah, childhood—an array of memories, some being much more pleasant than others: thunderstorms and cracks of lightning in the middle of the night; the ever comforting thumb; my unrelenting older brother, Lee, who took great pride in tormenting me, often knocking the air right out of me; my mother's skirt; the dark, where one never knows what lies; the bedroom lamp, which stayed on all night, illuminating the pink wallpaper with gallivanting kittens; Dogbone's pet blacksnake, which bit me; and my never-dying imagination, where I could always gallop proudly through the wilderness as a wild stallion. But retracing the path of unforgettable impressions on my life could never exclude Nana's homemade bread, for it remains the fondest of my memories.

Always believing that Nana was especially fond of me (I am her one and only granddaughter), I would get terribly excited when it came time to venture into Nana's house, for we would inevitably bake homemade bread (my all-time favorite). She was always so kind and loving (I think she enjoyed it as much as I did) as she would invite me to "help" her create her wonder. Not only did I get to knead the dough, but I also got to butter the bread pan. And after covering the dough-filled pan with the kitchen towel, we would put it on the warming oven to rise. Part of my job was to check the bread to see how much it had risen (a process I found to be most amazing). After checking it several dozen times, it would finally be time to rub the top with butter and pop it into the hot oven. As it baked, every breath was filled with the incomparable aroma, tastebuds tingling with uncontrollable delight. It was an eternity before that loaf of bread was a golden brown. Wide-eyed and eager, it was at this time that we would turn the bread onto the breadboard and make sure it came out all right. My mouth would water as Nana would cut into the loaf, steam rising, and it was always perfect.

Without this experience, I would never have known the wonders of homemade bread. I would never have learned how to knead the doughy mass, nor would I have fulfilled my senses with the sight and smell of it all. Yes, many memories haunt, others fade. But one memory still rings true. This memory is relished.

At 93 years of age, Nana still bakes the best homemade bread I'll ever taste. I can almost smell it now.

Fly Away Child

Fly away child, fly away from me
and when you return, here I shall be.
Fly with the wind, the laughter and song.
In the sunlight and blue sky you belong.
Soar with the eagle to the mountain's crest.
Glide on calm waters when you've need of rest.
As you ponder on life, you've no need to fear
for one who loves you will always be near.

Beth Stevenson

THE END



SHORT FICTION BY DEBBIE BRESHEARS

"RAPTURE. DO YOU BELIEVE IT? Will the prophecy be fulfilled today? That was the headline of the *New York Times* on September 12, 1988. Samuel Mertz sat in his huge armchair skimming over the paper, the smell of expensive leather penetrating his nostrils. On his forty-five-inch, color television screen, the noon news had just begun. The anchor man on NBC was discussing the rapture, which was to occur at 12:15 p.m. Eastern Time. "Bullshit," muttered Samuel. "I didn't become the richest man in New York by believing in some goon with repented sins saying that the heavens are going to open and some Almighty Creator is going to take me into heaven," Samuel screamed at the television set. "Get on with the stock reports."

Samuel was a self-made, "rags-to-riches" billionaire. At age forty-two, he had never been married and was considered by some to be the most ruthless business tycoon in New York City.

Suddenly, the picture on the huge screen behind his desk went blank. He picked up the remote control switching to several channels, with the same results—snow. "God damn, I'll miss the reports for sure," he exclaimed. He picked up the phone to call his stock broker. The line was dead. He pushed the switch hook up and down several times, to no avail. He slammed the receiver down on the cradle and rang for his secretary. "Where is that woman?" raged Samuel. "I'll dock her pay if she is loafing on the job again." He rang again with no response. "Florence, where in the hell are you?" he roared.

Samuel was a big man of six-feet-four weighing in at 230 pounds, and in his college days he was a lettered wrestler. He prided himself in keeping his body fit. He regularly worked out at the gym on the top floor of Metz Towers. His building was located on Fifth Avenue, downtown New York City. His office was on the twenty-fifth floor of the twenty-six-story building. The first four floors housed the Metz National Bank. Floors five through twenty-four were leased to several exclusive business firms.

After ringing two more times Samuel got up, muttering to himself, and stormed out through the double oak doors, slamming them hard enough to knock an NFL plaque off the wall. His eyes scanned the view in front of him. The office was completely devoid of people. Samuel glanced at his watch. It was 12:25 p.m. He employed fourteen secretaries, and not one was at her desk. He slammed his fist down on a desk causing a stack of folders to topple to the floor.

"What the hell is going on?!" he screamed. He stomped to the elevator, pressed the down button, shifting his weight back and forth as he waited for the elevator to appear. The door opened, and Samuel stepped in. "Take me to the bottom floor, George." He then turned to realize the elevator man was not at his post. "What the fuck?!"

He pressed the button to take him to the first floor. The doors opened, and Samuel's mouth dropped as he stumbled out of the elevator into the empty, main lobby of his bank. He began to have a slow churn in his stomach as he gazed unbelieving at the scene in front of

him. The vault door was standing open, the security guard was nowhere around—nobody was anywhere around. Samuel hurriedly walked to the vault door and slammed it shut. "No one is going to get my money," he said.

He began to look more closely and saw money on the counters of several teller windows. Signed checks and bank bags lay on several desks. In the corner by a woman's purse lay a child's teddybear with a red ribbon around its neck. He scrunched up his forehead and scratched his head and wandered out the front door. He grabbed the door and gasped as he looked out into the street. The normally crowded sidewalks of New York were bare. The cars on Fifth Avenue were empty, but several were still running. He dashed from car to car screaming, "Where everyone?!"

In the front seat of a yellow cab lay a newspaper. He began to read the headline. "Rapture...Oh, shit!"

Suddenly he heard a noise. It was soft at first, then became louder and louder, until it was so loud it hurt. He covered his ears with his hands and screamed. With tears rolling down his face, he turned and began to run back to his building. When he reached the front, he turned to glance back behind him and gulped as he saw the earth opening. Buildings were falling into a huge canyon and cars were tumbling in like falling dominoes. Just as quickly, Samuel and all his worldly possessions were swallowed into the darkness of the unknown.

And, then, there was nothing.

Twenty-First Century Sadness

Temporary absence
A contemporary madness
Twenty-first century sadness
People following the sun
Hollow dreams overcome

Protection from the spirit
She's able to be near it
She does not fear it
She can see but she can't hear it

Rainbows caressing the Earth
Golden moments for her

Constant changing values
A modernistic concept
Twenty-first century sadness
A space-age defect

Has she lost her virtue
My lack of respect
Twenty-first century sadness
What does she expect

Twenty-first century sadness
A contemporary madness
Temporary absence
People try to hide the truth
Twenty-first century of the youth

Protection from the spirit
She's able to be near it
She does not fear it
She can see but she can't hear it

Golden moments for her
Rainbows caressing the earth

Mike L. Mallory

Untitled

His eyes laugh,
The voice rings.
But the spirit
dances.
And the soul—
IT sings.

Laurie Evans

Dreams

Dreams
filaments
gossamer gown

sheens
innocence
shimmering down

Threads
unravel
tearing apart

Shreads
bedevil
bright dreams depart

Beth Stevenson

Puppets

Cold compassion
Merciful pain
The course is plotted
abandon refrain

We waltz about the floor in utter agony
Each step bringing more pain than the last
Compelled, somehow, as though it were our destiny
Convinced there is no way to break fate's cast

In the lap of the gods
is where we'll meet
and lay our offerings
at his feet

run like hell
in doubt and fear
while praying to luck
that he can't hear
Count the dead!
I've done my part
I'll see the finish
but not the start

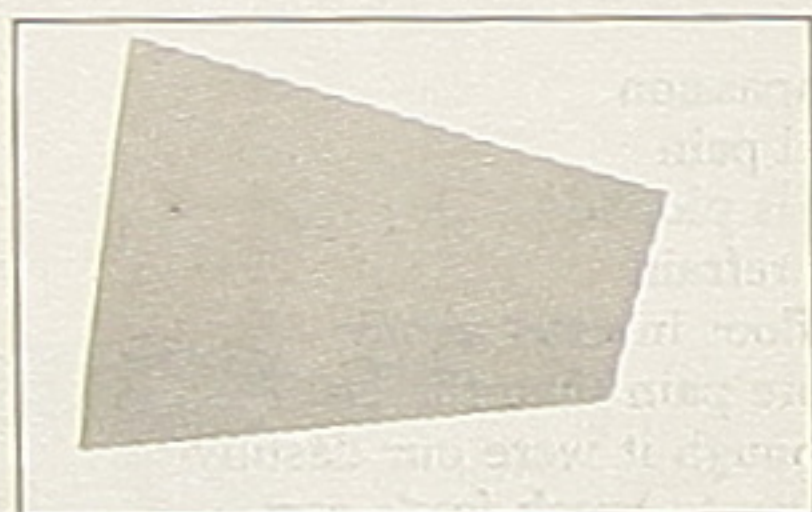
Who will be the last one standing?
Does it matter anyway?
the sole survivor-technically stranded
the game no longer worth the play
too late,
can't beat the fate,
awaiting chance,
condemned to wait.

the course is plotted, abandon refrain
Cold compassion
merciful pain
the sole survivor, again and again.

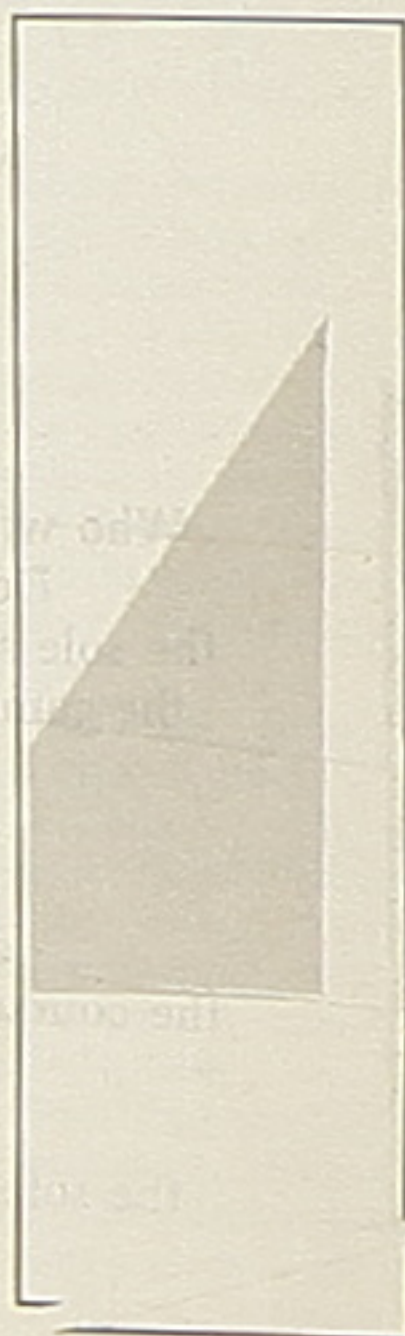
Curtis J. Steere



Laurie Evans



Laurie Evans

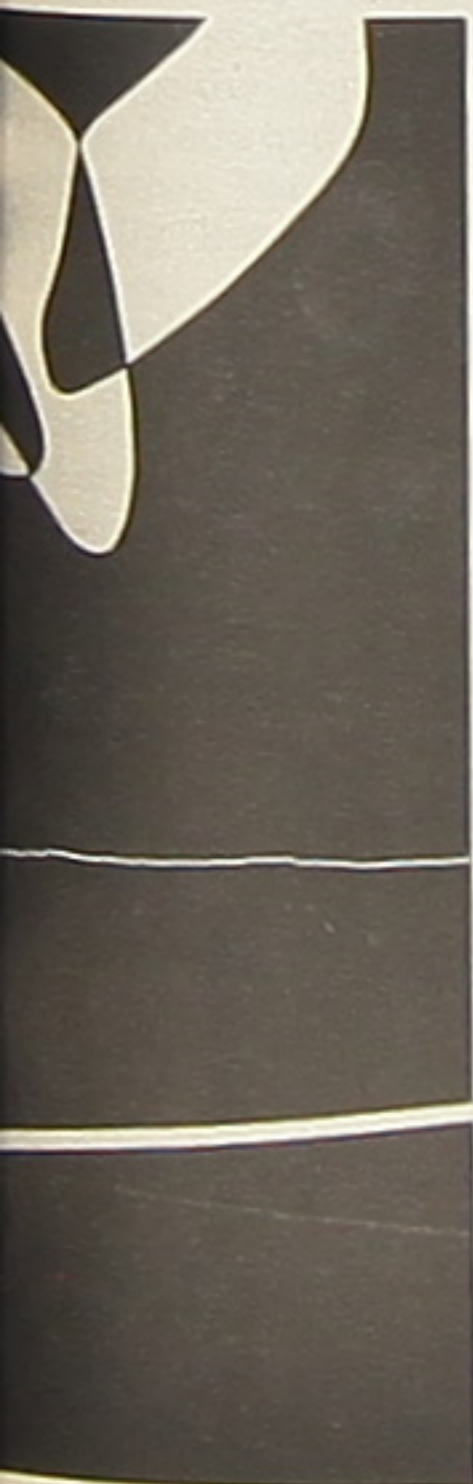


The Gallery

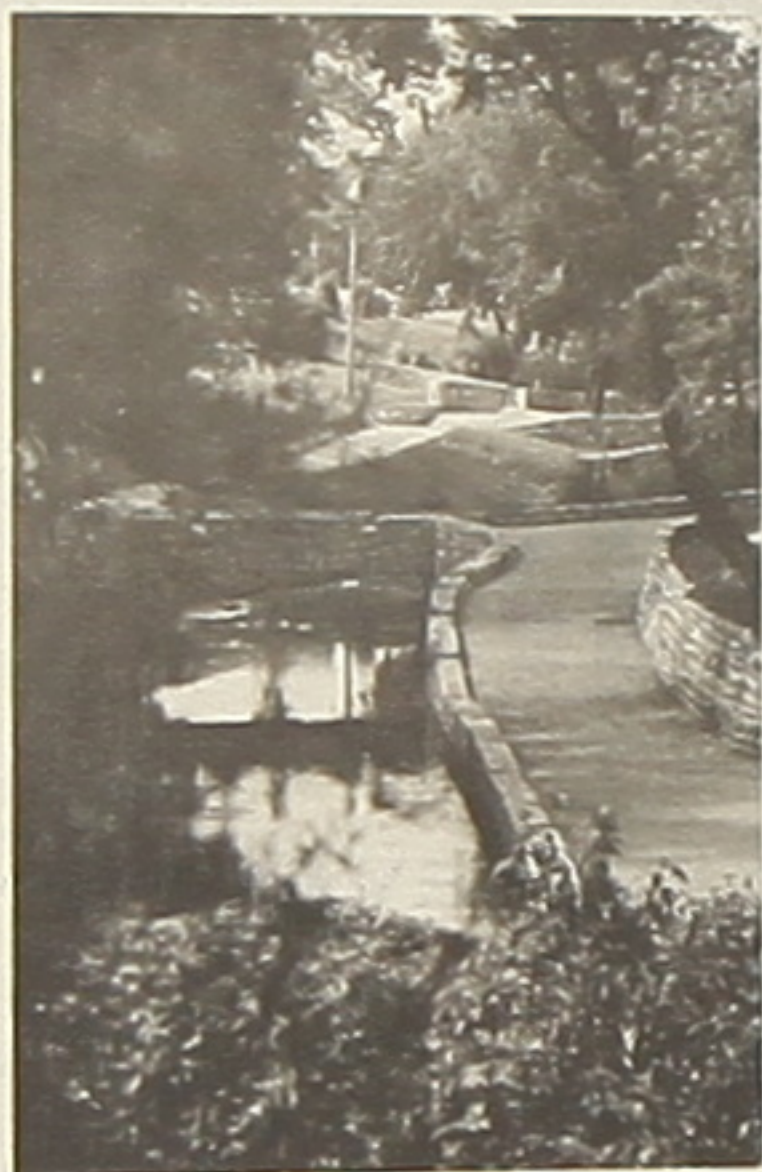




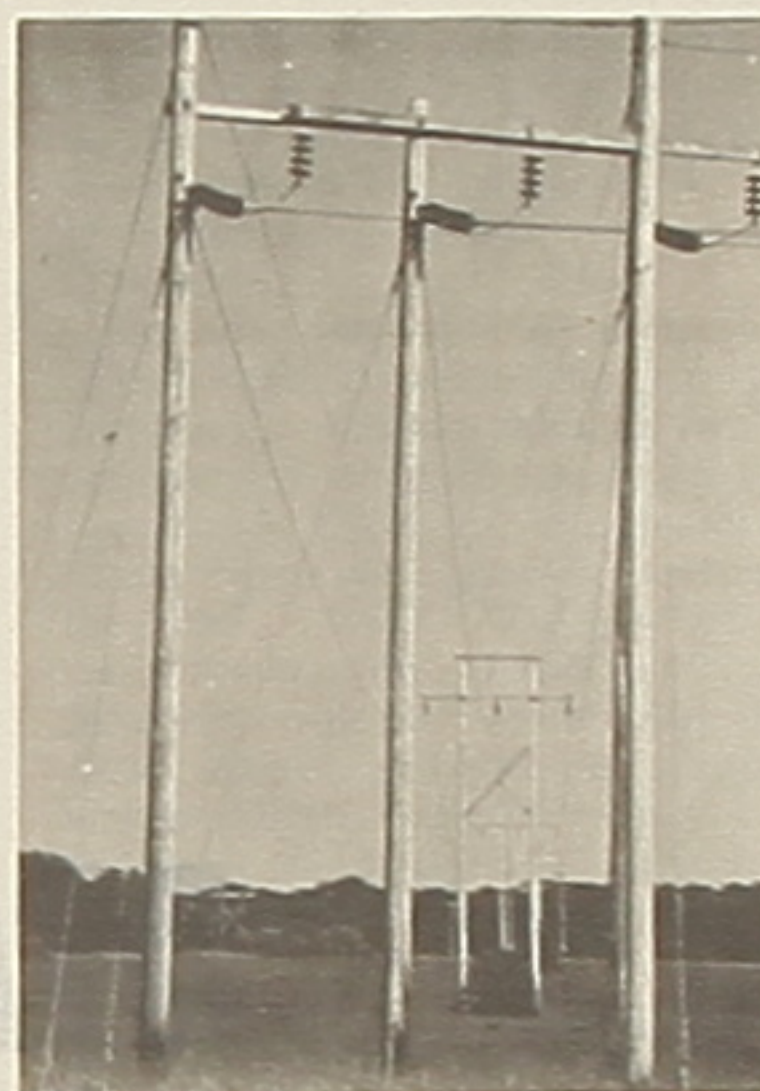
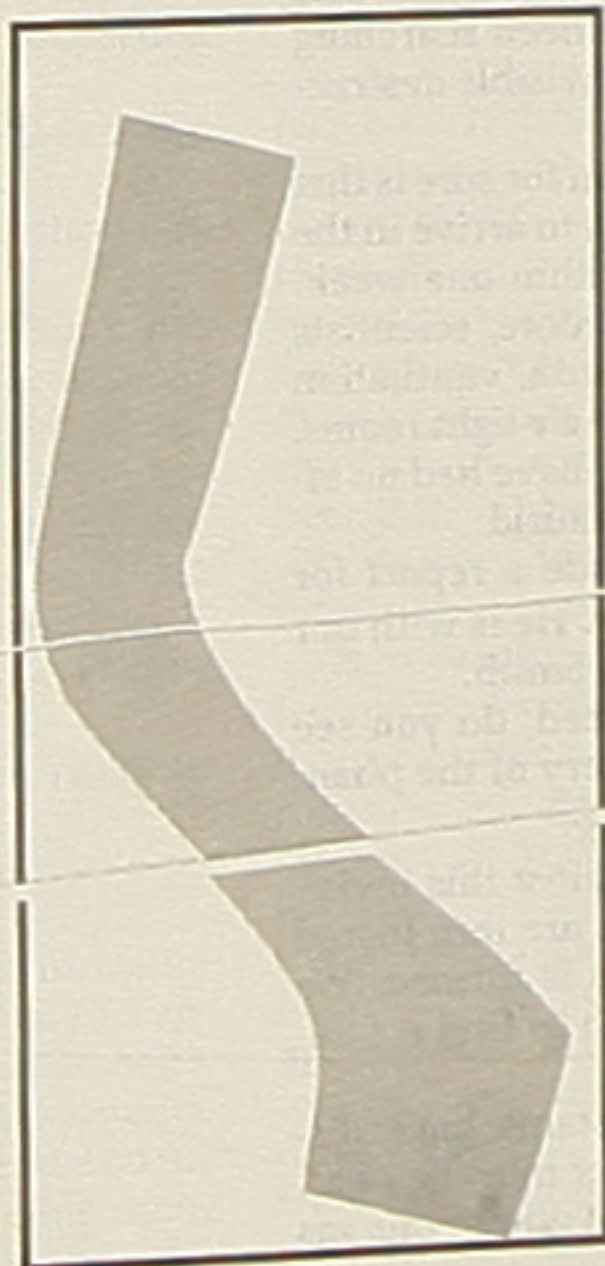
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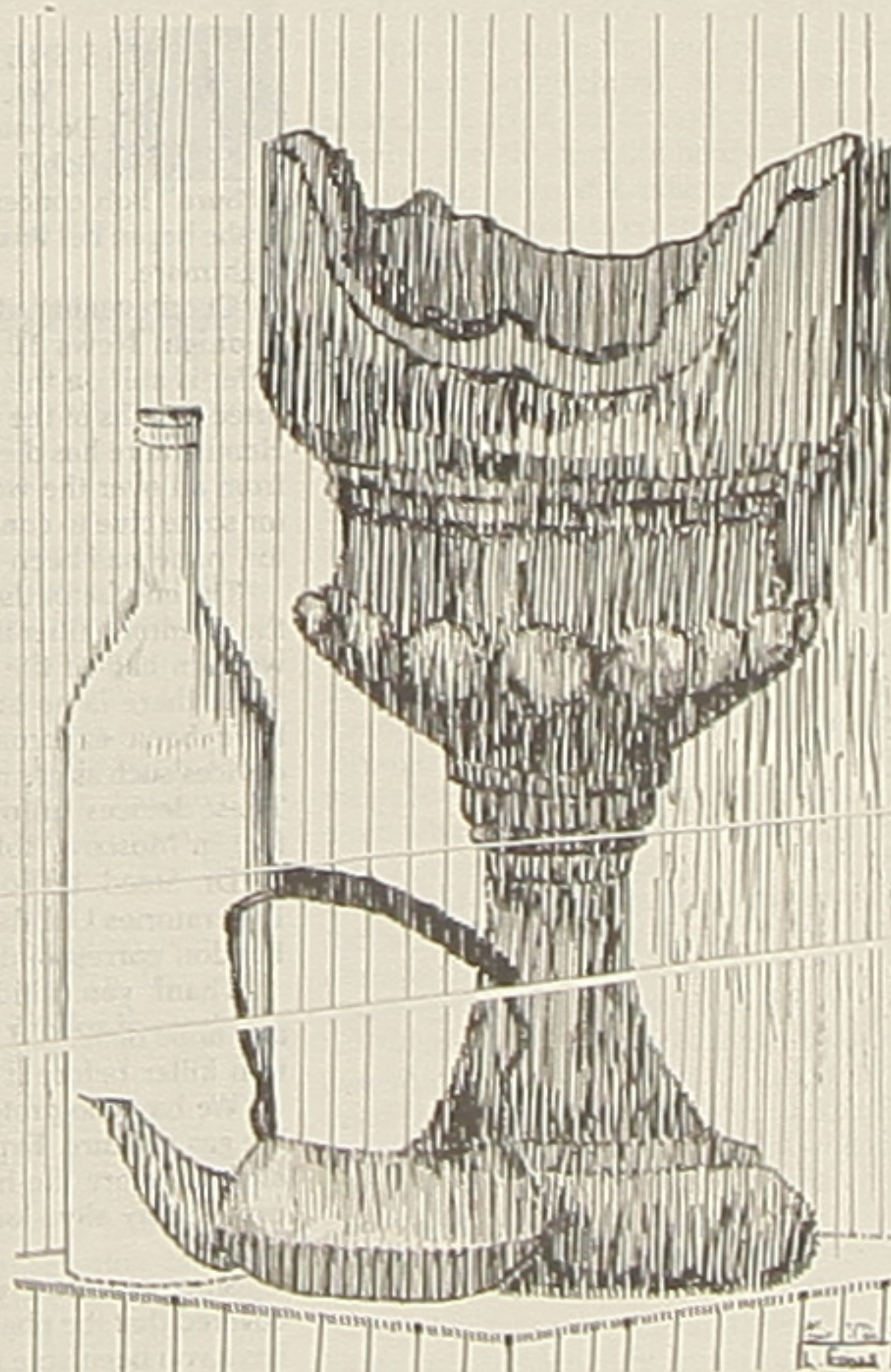
Laurie Evans



Mary Hanewinkel



Mary Hanewinkel



Laurie Evans



Randall Simmons

MENGRIN

SHORT FICTION BY BETH STEVENSON



"IS SHE TAPING YET?"

"Yes. She's just going on the air. Do you want to stay and watch, Bob?"

"Sure." Bob, concerned for his wife, watched as she began her broadcast of everyone's worst nightmare.

"Good evening, this is Linda Swanson for Midnight News 10, Chicago...The phantom killer is still on the rampage. Approximately three-fourths of the population of the Eastern Hemisphere has died. Even though scientists from all over the world have been searching for some clue to control this invisible destructor, none has been found.

"The one factor that is known for sure is that the phantom killer is expected to arrive in the western half of the world within one week. Since there is no known antidote, scientists have been experimenting with ventilation devices such as gas masks and air-tight rooms. These devices, unfortunately, have had no effect in Moscow, Tokyo, or Madrid.

"Dr. Steed, of London, made a report for Laboratories Unlimited today. He is with our London correspondent, Jack Smith."

"Thank you, Linda. Dr. Steed, do you see any hope of solving the mystery of the phantom killer before it's too late?"

"We have no protection against this invisible gas mixture. Experiments are terminated almost before the hypothesis is formed. We cannot stay alive long enough to find a solution."

"Since you and your assistants have discovered that the phantom killer must be a gas, have you been able to find out where this gas may have originated?"

"The gas may have been used for research in biological warfare. We believe it originated somewhere near the point of the phantom

killer's first appearance. Supposedly, all those involved with the formation of the phantom killer are dead. The phantom killer is able to penetrate all materials, and it kills instantaneously. In order to stop this nightmare, therefore, we have to find out *what* the phantom killer is."

"One last question, Dr. Steed, are there any clues as to what is keeping some people from dying?"

"As of now, we have no conclusive evidence since we are having trouble communicating with those still alive."

"Thank you, Dr. Steed. This is Jack Smith saying 'Good night' from London. Linda?"

"Thank you, Jack. Just in, a Nobel Prize winner and survivor of the phantom killer, Dr. Olga Schmidt, was granted asylum at the Radiology Research Center. It took her a week to reach a place the phantom killer had not yet destroyed. She says that she saw no other survivors. Good luck to her and the other scientists at the Center."

"President Reagan had little to say during his daily news conference today. He made this simple statement, 'The only solution is prayer, for only a miracle can save us now.'"

"Unless there are any new developments, we will be back on the air at six a.m. and give hourly updates on the phantom killer. This is Linda Swanson signing off for Midnight News 10, Chicago. Good night."

As Linda finished the newscast, she slumped over in her chair. Even though Linda was one of the prettiest news personalities, it was obvious from the dark circles under her eyes and the appearance of new wrinkles, that the strain was affecting her as it was everyone. Ever since the phantom killer first appeared in Asia, Linda had been pushing herself even harder than her normally frantic schedule. Naturally, her co-workers were concerned about her.

"Are you all right, Linda?" asked Sarah, the makeup specialist.

"Hell, no! How can you ask a question like that at a time like this?"

Concerned, frail Sarah meekly shook her head in time with her frightened heart. She, like many others, was unable to face death.

Linda exclaimed, "Dear God, I don't know how much more I can take. It all seems like a dream—a terrible dream—but it won't go away, and I don't wake up to relief—just fear." Linda's typical apology did little to relieve Sarah.

Bob entered the studio. "Hi, Babe, ready to go?"

"Bob, am I glad to see you. Yes, let's go home."

Bob went to Linda and kissed her forehead to try and erase the new wrinkles that had appeared there. Like most husbands with famous wives, Bob was in the background. Yet, he was strong, with a kind heart and an undying love for Linda. Bob was a big man, standing 6-foot-6 and weighing 200 pounds, all muscle; with straight, white-blond hair; and the bronzed skin that comes from being outdoors often. He was one of the those rare

architects that enjoys the whole process of construction.

As husband and wife entered the cool, spring air, Bob voiced his concern. "Linda, aren't you pushing yourself a little too hard lately?"

"You, too?! I don't want to sit around and wait to die! Just let me get through this nightmare the best I can, okay?"

Bob nodded, not in response to Linda's query, but in acknowledgement of her feelings. He knew that she would never be one to give up even when the fight was hopeless. They were silent as they got into their dark blue LTD. Poor Bob, Linda thought, *he doesn't need this harangue. He's just trying to show how much he cares.*

"Listen, Bob, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to jump on you like that. I just need some sleep."

"Linda?"

"Yes, Bob?"

"I love you."

Linda smiled as she replied, "I love you, too." She leaned on Bob's shoulder as he

After the phone had rung twenty-two times, she knew it was no use. The phantom killer had arrived. That could be the only explanation.

started the car. He kissed the top of her head, then put the car into 'Drive' and started home.

* * *

NINE DAYS LATER: Linda awoke and it was still raining. She patted Bob and said, "I'll get the breakfast." She hummed Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall" as she fried some bacon and eggs and sipped some freshly-brewed coffee. *That's when coffee is best*, she thought. For some reason, she felt better than she had in weeks. Linda even laughed at herself for humming, when the phantom killer was due in Chicago any moment. The West Coast was already destroyed.

"Bob! Breakfast." No rumble came from the bedroom. She spoke louder, "Hey, Baby, it's morning already." When there was still no response, which was unusual, she thought that he must be very tired. Linda went into the bedroom and lay on the bed next to Bob. She snuggled up against his smooth back and gently bit his ear. "Come on, Sleepyhead, wake up." He did not move. Scared now, Linda turned him over. She realized that he was dead. "Bob, oh, no! You can't be dead." She frantically ran for the phone and called the hospital. "Answer, dammit! Answer!" After the phone had rung twenty-two times, she knew it was no use. The phantom killer had arrived. That could be the only explanation.

Linda sank down to the plush carpeting and curled into a fetal position. She rocked back and forth, staring straight ahead without seeing. As the clock cheerily chimed seven, Linda shook herself out of her trance. "If I'm still alive, there must be others. I can't be the only one."

Linda ran out into the street, ignoring the rain as it quickly soaked her thin nightgown, and was shocked into stillness. Two teenagers were wrapped in each other's arms in an old, blue Chevy. The lights were on and the windshield wipers were going. It looked as though they had paused to kiss goodbye and then were frozen in time. Linda jerkily walked to the driver's side and wrenched the door open. As she shook the couple, they fell apart. Their weighted limbs spilled over the seat and into the street. Linda quickly turned from them and saw Andy, the newspaper boy, sprawled on the sidewalk with a newspaper clutched in his hand. He was soaking wet from his short, cropped, red hair to his tattered, white tennis shoes. His dog lay a few feet away.

Linda's thoughts ran around her mind like an echo bouncing off canyon walls. "Sally!" Her mind pounced on the name. If anyone was still alive, her lifelong friend Sally would be. Linda ran to Sally's house and retrieved the spare key from its usual resting place, on the ornate wind chime. As she entered the house, she tried not to notice the quiet. The minute she entered the bedroom, she knew it would do no good. Linda, nevertheless, went to her friend and tried to shake her awake. "Sally, please wake up. Please." Sally was dead, too. Linda's stomach lurched and she vomited, choking on burning bile. *Why didn't I die with everyone else?* she thought. Numb and dejected, Linda walked slowly home. As she entered her own bedroom and saw Bob lying there, she gave in to the sob that rose up and cried hard for some time. When she was exhausted, she sat up and told herself, "You've got to do something. You're going to go crazy if you don't. So, move."

She grabbed a pair of old, comfortable blue jeans off the floor of her closet and slipped them over her round hips. After digging through her dresser, she finally came up with the yellow sweater she wanted, not that it mattered what she wore, she thought. She slipped the sweater on, ignoring the fact that it restrained her full breasts. She stumbled into the hall and yanked on black boots and a red raincoat. Halfway out of the door, she stopped and went back to the bedroom.

"I'm sorry, Bob, I have to leave. Maybe, just maybe, there is someone..." Linda straightened the baby blue spread and tucked Bob in and fluffed the pillow under his head. She stooped over and kissed Bob on the cheek as she whispered, "Bye, Bob."

Glancing up, she noticed her reflection in the mirror on the open, closet door. Even though her face was pale and eyes shadowed, Linda was undeniably beautiful. Her long,

Continued
on page 10



black hair gleamed against the shiny surface of her raincoat. Linda was one of those lucky women that seemed to have maintained the slimness of youth, despite her obvious, rounded countours and her twenty-eight years. The woman-in-the-mirror's eyebrows arched quizzically. Linda, in answer, smiled an awry smile. "Well, you wouldn't want me traipsing through town in my nightgown, would you? I'd probably catch cold." Linda did not stay to converse with her reflection any longer, but left with a determined stride.

* * *

MEANWHILE: OLGA STRETCHED luxuriously. She hadn't been to bed for three days, and the strain was evident. It felt good to lie in bed for a few minutes before getting up. With her normal forthrightness, Olga told herself to stop being lazy and get up. After a refreshing shower, Olga studied herself in the mirror. Three weeks ago, Olga had been a short, plump woman with healthy skin; rosy cheeks and all; and shiny, short-cropped, blonde hair. Now, the only real bulge she had was her protruding stomach that carried her first child. Her skin had become sallow and her hair was in wild disarray.

The steady beat of rain drew her to the window. "Is that all it ever does here? Rain, rain, rain! Listen to me. I never thought I'd end up talking to myself. Well, I guess the phantom killer is bound to change us all. Damn, I must be getting close to the brink." A short, staccato laugh sounded in the sparsely-furnished room. Insanity was the last thing one would attribute to Olga Schmidt. She was known for her outstanding contributions to the scientific field of radiology. Being from communistic East Germany, she was a level-headed, no-nonsense woman in her early forties. When the phantom killer had attacked the Eastern Hemisphere, she had reasonably asked to come to the U.S. to continue her research. Everyone around her had died, including her scientist husband, Franz. It had been a long hike to find someone alive, but Olga didn't let that deter her from her research. There wasn't time to grieve now.

Olga was being accommodated at the new Radiology Research Center, in Chicago. The Center had been built to study the effects of nuclear radiation. It boasted all of the latest equipment, as well as living facilities, and had been placed under maximum security by the President. It had a network of underground tunnels and twenty floors above ground. The Center had been labeled, however, as another waste of taxpayers' money—until the phantom killer came along, that is.

Olga dressed in her crisp, white uniform and went downstairs via the new "express elevator." She was well-satisfied with the elevators, as they eliminated a needless waste of time. As the doors slid open, Olga stopped short. She had seen the destruction wrought by the phantom killer before, yet nothing could diminish the shock of the sight before her.

Sighing, Olga stepped from the elevator. She

mechanically checked for signs of a pulse or a heartbeat. It pained her to think that the world had lost such a great mind as that of Dr. Samuel Peters. He was slouched in his chair, his arms dangling at his side. The long wisp of gray hair that usually covered his otherwise bald head, hung uselessly over his ear. It looked as though he had just given in to exhaustion and fallen asleep. As a matter of fact, that is how everyone looked, as though they had fallen asleep in their tracks. After Olga had checked a few of the staff—knowing it would be senseless to continue—she got a cup of coffee and sat down with the dead Dr. Peters to think.

* * *

LINDA WAS CONVINCED that she would find someone alive if she just looked in every house or building. After two hours of this, Linda was beginning to wonder if she really was the only one still alive. Everywhere she looked, there were dead bodies. She had seen people in the act of making love, eating, and watching television. She had also seen cars

It had been a long hike to find someone alive, but Olga didn't let that deter her from her research. There wasn't time to grieve now.

strewn about as though by a hard wind, with their dead drivers at the wheels. She was tired of hearing a noise and running in that direction only to find that electrical appliances were running of their own accord or that gravity had pulled a car to the bottom of a hill with the motor still running. Each time that Linda thought she had finally found someone, she was rewarded with the same answer—everyone was dead.

"I've got to sit down and rest. God, the stench is terrible here." Linda looked around to determine where she was and she spotted the Radiology Research Center. "Ah, the Center. Our last hope turned out to be just what the public thought—a waste of money. The people have the last laugh on this one." Linda stopped talking to herself. She was afraid that if this kept on, she would just lie down and die.

* * *

WHILE OLGA HAD been checking each floor of the Center to determine if there was anyone else alive, she got tired of the terrible smell of death and went to the window to breathe fresher air. A flash of red caught her eye. "There's a person down there!" She couldn't be positive that there was a person

from the height of the sixteenth floor, something about the posture of the red gave Olga hope. She rushed to get to that person as quickly as possible. In her hurry to find the person, she forgot that she would end up on the opposite side of the Center. As she turned the corner and saw a young woman in a red raincoat, she unconsciously let out a sigh of relief.

"Hello. I'm glad I wasn't mistaken. I spotted you from the sixteenth floor."

Linda froze. She thought she must really be desperate to dream up a ghostly figure in white.

Seeing Linda's expression, Olga laughed a little as she said, "I'm real—no doubt about that."

Before Olga could finish her introduction, Linda threw herself into the scientist's arms, exclaiming, "Thank God! Someone else is alive!" Tears choked off any words that would have expressed Linda's ecstasy at finding another living person. The next few minutes were spent in tearful delight on Linda's part and calm reassurance on Olga's part.

Releasing the embrace, Olga said, "My name is Olga Schmidt. I'm from East Berlin and I am a scientist. Why don't we go inside and have a cup of coffee?"

"Olga Schmidt? It seems I've heard your name before." Linda's reporter instincts kicked over as she tried to tie in the name. "Oh, yes, I've got it. You survived the phantom killer before. I remember your story because I read it over a television station here. I'm a news broadcaster." With a nod and a look of respect in Olga's eyes, Linda continued. "My name is Linda Swanson. Oh, God—not more bodies!" she protested as they arrived at the cafeteria. Linda hesitated in the doorway, not wanting to enter. She had grown to hate the sight as well as the odor.

"It cannot be helped, Linda, if we are to have coffee." Linda remained transfixed. Olga offered to pour the coffee. "Cream or sugar?"

"Black, please." Linda thought about Bob for the first time since leaving him this morning. He liked cream and sugar. Tears flooded her eyes. Then, a thought bounced out of her mouth before she could stop it. "Olga, do you think there is any chance that maybe everyone is just unconscious. You see, my husband..."

Linda halted at Olga's frown. Olga dismissed the futility of such a suggestion.

"No, Linda. They are dead and rotting. So is your husband. You might as well face it now. There is no way to bring back the dead."

Linda was shocked at Olga's callousness, but she slowly accepted the cup of coffee. She recovered enough to close her mouth and to feel the bitterness Olga's words had caused.

"Don't look so shocked, Linda. What we have to concern ourselves with is: isolating the phantom killer before it kills almost everyone. The way the wind currents have been steadily swirling, we don't have much time. Let's sit down and let's discuss a plan."

"I guess you're right," Linda grudgingly admitted.

* * *

TWENTY HOURS LATER, it was apparent that neither woman was near a solution.

"Well, Olga, any news?" Linda asked as she came into the lab.

"No. I have isolated a foreign substance—to me at least—but I cannot determine if it is the phantom killer. I'm at a dead end. How are you doing?"

"Not any better than you are. I haven't been able to locate anyone on the shortwave radio, and we've received no response to my televised plea. Even the banner I hung outside the Center's top floor seems futile. Is it possible that we are the only two people alive?"

Olga sighed. Linda was apt to jump to conclusions, and she was obviously not patient enough for her duties, she thought. Olga wished she had just one lab technician; even a poor one would do. In a weary tone, she replied, "It does not seem possible that we are the only survivors."

Linda disliked Olga's constant calm. *This woman is emotionless*, she thought. "Well, what do we have in common," Linda sarcastically quipped. "We are built differently and think differently. I don't see—"

"That's it! How stupid of me. I was so busy trying to identify the substance I ignored the obvious." Linda had a blank look on her face. "Don't you see, Linda? What we have in common is what is keeping us alive. Now, what do we have in common?" At Linda's smirk and shaking head, Olga sternly said, "I will have to give you a thorough exam."

Linda didn't want to submit, considering her dislike of Olga, but she knew that the scientist was her only hope. Linda shivered as she undressed and climbed onto the hard, cold, metal table.

Linda fell asleep shortly after the exam. She was unable to hold her head upright any longer and gave in to the welcome sleep. Olga spent the time analyzing the data from the blood tests and comparing their physical compositions. Olga was apt to agree with Linda, as it appeared that they didn't have anything in common, except that they were in relatively good health and female.

Linda awoke screaming. Olga barely glanced over at her. She wore a worried frown. Linda's fear turned to anger as Olga ignored her. "Did you find anything?" Linda spat.

"No. It's unbelievable. You have blood type AB, mine is O. You have had your appendix out, and I haven't. You had the German measles," Linda winced at this, "and I had the three-day. I'm four months pregnant. You're not pregnant. We don't have any abnormality that could have protected us. I'm not sure. I will run another check shortly. In the meantime, keep trying to reach someone on the radio."

Linda's face held a closed look. Olga had condemned her to a prison of calling on *that damn radio* to no avail, Linda thought. She wanted to scream at her to do it herself, but something in the back of her mind told her

that shouting would make their relationship even more tenuous.

"If you don't mind, Olga, I think I'll take a walk. I need some air," Linda brusquely said.

Olga waved her out of the room as though she had already forgotten that Linda was there. Linda decided to walk downtown. She felt free as a child playing hooky with no adults to watch over her. There were hardly any bodies along ritzy Michigan Avenue. Linda passed an old wino and almost tripped over a distinguished, silver-haired man. As she studied this well-dressed gentleman, she noticed a keyring with a sizable number of keys. One of the keys had "FA" printed on it, and Linda was standing right in front of a Fifth Avenue boutique.

Glancing around furtively, Linda quickly unhooked the keyring from his belt. She walked to the gold-lettered door and shakily slipped the key into the brass doorknob. "It fits. It fits!" she squealed in delight. Linda guiltily covered her mouth and ducked inside. She had been inside a few times with her rich Aunt Elizabeth. The proprietor, lying on the sidewalk outside, had pampered her aunt but looked down his nose at *her*. Linda pretended that she was the pampered customer this time.

"Don't you see, Linda? What we have in common is what is keeping us alive. Now, what do we have in common?"

"Why certainly, sir. I would like to look at your finest rabbit fur. I so adore white." A girlish giggle escaped Linda's lips as she rushed to the rear of the store to try on her dream coat. Admiring herself in the three-way mirror, Linda was pleased that the fit was perfect. She chose a few more items and decided to take a severe, blue dress to Olga. She was tired of seeing those white uniforms of hers.

Linda skipped a few steps in glee. Despite Olga's coldness, Linda wanted share her new treasures. With heels clicking smartly on the hard floor, Linda called out, "Olga. You'll never guess where I've been. Look—"

Linda gasped at the sight of another woman, obviously pregnant. Her dark, black skin shone in the afternoon sunlight filtering through the windows. She had on one of those tent dresses that only pregnant women look good in. Her hair was tightly curled, and the sun glanced off of her extremely white, widely-spaced teeth. The stranger grinned with the knowledge that she had solved the mystery. Linda rushed to her and hugged her and cried tears of relief.

"There is someone else alive. Am I glad to see you!"

"Hi, Linda," the woman said shyly. "I never knew I'd end up with two such famous people. My name's Maggie. I'm a family main-

tainer."

At Linda's puzzled look, Olga explained, "That's Maggie's way of saying she's a housewife."

"Oh. No matter who you are, you're the saver of my sanity. It's great to meet you, Maggie." The two women grinned at each other.

Olga even smiled. "Now that the introductions have been made, I have an important question to ask you, Linda. When was your last period?"

"I think I'm a few days late, but it's happened before—and with all that's been going on, I thought it was due to that."

Olga stared at her and then burst out laughing. Linda had never seen Olga laugh and was astounded that such a pleasant sound came from her.

"What! Do you mean...I mean, is pregnancy the answer? Is that why we're still alive?"

"Yes, yes! Don't you see? Pregnant women produce a substance called mengrin. This is what protected us. There must be numerous women alive."

Maggie couldn't resist saying, "And to think of all those poor women who thought they were being smart by using birth control!"

The three women laughed and came closer to touch each other. Their laughter came close to hysteria as they wiped the tears from their eyes.

"Olga, you're crying," Linda said in awe.

"Of course. Who ever heard of a woman that didn't cry?" Their laughter bubbled up again in delight with each other.

Olga stopped first and mused aloud, "We could die if we gave birth or lost the fetus before the phantom killer leaves the atmosphere."

"How long will that be, Olga?" Linda asked.

"According to the way the volcanic ash from Mount St. Helen moved, it should take two or three weeks. Then, we'll be safe. The phantom killer apparently doesn't work like radiation, in that it doesn't contaminate the soil or other substances. So, if we can stay pregnant another month, we should be safe."

Linda and Olga turned to Maggie and eyed her rather large abdomen. "How long before you're due, Maggie?"

"Don't worry about me none, I always get real big and carry over my due date. I should have about six weeks," Maggie chuckled as she said reminiscently, "My man always believed that saying that 'Women should be kept barefoot and pregnant.' He was like that, but he was a good man."

Linda laughed and said, "Yes, I know what you're saying. There are still many man who think a woman is there for carrying their children. We know better, and we sure proved it this time." The three women nodded and then, just for the hell of it, laughed. It felt good to be able to laugh.

"No offense, Maggie."

"None taken. I always knew women were in control, but I never knew we'd be the only ones around. It'll take some getting used to."

Linda hugged the two women to her and said, "We'll be fine—just fine." □

Here And Now

This is the body
That has given you a lifetime
Speaking from the inside

Not a heartbeat
Not respiration
no astral projection
This is here and now

I can make you a fool (said the voice)
Only you can control my movement
If you loose you judgement
I will pull you through

I can make you forget
The things you thought meant so much
If you've lost touch with the world
You've just met your imagination

This is the body
That has given you a lifetime
Speaking from the inside

Not a media event
No need to tell anyone
Don't mention me or the possibilities
Or you will fall behind what has begun

Not a heartbeat
Not respiration
No astral projection
This is here and now

Mike L. Mallory

Clownspin

Circus sisters stand in the shadow
of a clown

He laughs. They smile
and rustle their skirts
with a swish, swish sound.

They stand, toes pointed outward,
painting faces onto piquant masques.
White White Faces. Red Red Lips. China Doll Eyes

Look, look, look.

Clown smiles and turns his mind
inside out.

Sisters stare in mock dismay.
Clown is a bubble blowing away
over a lake so blue.

He pulls his shadow from the two
and laughs in dissarray.

Diann Hays

Living on Lev

Images are cast against the
scaled down

Kings and Queens on the
are controlling what they don't

While few can leave the darkness
others seem to crawl into the
only to relive the

They are just one
always ready
Their evil master in
beckons them, as they

Revolutions live and die in
Eyes watch

Bottles and shots are on the
take one more drink and then no more

Monty Breckenridge

0021-2-000

Monty Breckenridge
Debbie Breshears
Laurie Evans
Mary Hanewinkel
Diann Hays
Brenda Cates Kilby
Mike L. Mallory
Randall Simmons
Curtis J. Steere
Beth Stevenson